



Demand for Import of Genetically Modified Soy Seeds

Why in News

The **poultry industry is demanding** a permit for the **import of crushed genetically modified (GM) soy seeds for captive consumption of farmers** from the Central government.

- **Non-fiscal and fiscal relief measures** which include the restructuring of term loans and additional working capital **has also been demanded** from the Centre and State governments.

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GM CROPS IN INDIA A PRIMER

What is a GM crop?
A crop which has a gene artificially inserted into it from another species, even unrelated, to give it some desired properties. GM crops are mostly either pest-resistant or herbicide-tolerant

When did India get its first GM crop?
The first GM crop variety approved for commercialisation was Bt cotton. Bollgard-I, which provided immunity against the pink bollworm and developed by Monsanto, was given the go ahead in 2002. Monsanto released Bollgard-II in 2006. India has become the world's largest producer of cotton partly due to Bt cotton, which accounts for over 90% of the total cotton acreage in the country

Are there other GM crops in India?
No, the government has not approved commercial cultivation of other GM crops, though efforts have been made for brinjal and mustard

Key Points

- **GM Crops:**
 - A **GM or transgenic crop** is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.
 - For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination.
 - **Conventional plant breeding** involves crossing of species of the same genus to provide the offspring with the desired traits of both parents.
 - Genus is a class of items such as a group of animals or plants with similar traits,

qualities or features.

- **Cross breeding** can take a long time to achieve desired results and frequently, characteristics of interest do not exist in any related species.
- **Bt cotton** is the **only GM crop that is allowed in India**. It has alien genes from the soil bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) that allows the crop to develop a protein toxic to the common pest **pink bollworm**.
- **Herbicide Tolerant Bt (Ht Bt) cotton**, on the other hand is derived with the insertion of an additional gene, from another soil bacterium, which allows the plant to resist the common herbicide glyphosate.
- In **Bt brinjal**, a gene allows the plant to resist attacks of fruit and shoot borers.
- In **DMH-11 mustard**, genetic modification allows cross-pollination in a crop that self-pollinates in nature.
- **Status of GM Soyseeds in India:**
 - India allows the import of **GM soybean and canola oil**.
 - Import of **GM soya bean seeds** has not been approved in India.
 - The main fear is that import of GM soya bean will **affect the Indian soya bean industry by contaminating non-GM varieties**.
- **Reasons for the Demand:**
 - The outbreak of **Covid-19** has created a massive crisis which led to an **initial depletion of demand in chicken products** owing to false news about the linkage between the virus and poultry products.
 - This created an **unwarranted financial crisis** and led to the erosion of **working capital (used for day-to-day operations)**.
 - Since the last several months, high speculation activities in soya contracts on **National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX)** has been disturbing the sector.
 - The NCDEX is an online commodities exchange dealing primarily in agricultural commodities in India.
 - The **rise in the soybean process** had led to the **skyrocketing of prices of eggs and chicken products** in the retail market.
 - The import for the particular time frame will stabilise the raw material market.
- **Approval Process for GM crops in India:**
 - In India, the **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)** is the apex body that **allows for commercial release of GM crops**.
 - Use of the unapproved GM variant can attract a **jail term of 5 years and fine of Rs. 1 lakh** under the **Environment Protection Act, 1986**.
 - **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** is the authorised body to **regulate the imported crops in India**.
- **Some Related Initiatives:**
 - **Poultry Venture Capital Fund (PVCF):**
 - The **Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying** is implementing it under **“Entrepreneurship development and Employment generation” (EDEG)** of the **National Livestock Mission**.
 - It is a bankable programme and the Central Government is providing subsidy through **National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD)** for those beneficiaries taking loan for PVCF.
 - **National Livestock Mission:**
 - Different programmes under the **National Livestock Mission** under which financial assistance is provided to States/Union Territories for implementation of Rural Backyard Poultry Development (RBPD) and Innovative Poultry Productivity

Project (IPPP).

◦ **Assistance to States for Control of Animal Diseases (ASCAD) Scheme:**

- ASCAD under “**Livestock Health and Disease Control**” (LH&DC) which covers the **vaccination of economically important poultry diseases** viz., Ranikhet Disease, Infectious Bursal Disease, Fowl Pox etc., including control and containment of emergent and exotic diseases like Avian Influenza.

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